



Marine Recreational Information Program 2016-2017 Implementation Plan Update

Better Data, Better Fishing

Improving Recreational Saltwater Fishing Estimates
Through Federal-Regional-State-Stakeholder Collaboration



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Through our strategic process, MRIP has guided a collaboration of federal, regional, state, and stakeholder partners through a series of survey improvements.

The Evolving MRIP Strategy for Improved Data Collection

Expanding Our Strategic Approach

Since its inception, MRIP has followed a three-tiered process for making improvements to our estimates of saltwater recreational fishing catch and effort.

- **Evaluation** of our existing methods to fully understand what's working well, what needs improvement, and the tradeoffs inherent in making changes to our surveys.
- **Innovation** aimed at developing new approaches and using emerging technologies to improve our surveys and the systems and processes that support them.
- **Implementation** of new methods at the regional level, working with partners to ensure a smooth transition between one approach and another.

Through this process, MRIP has guided a collaboration of federal, regional, state, and stakeholder partners through a series of survey improvements. These have ranged from complete overhauls of some of our surveys, such as those for catch and effort on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. In other regions, we have supported more incremental enhancements to existing programs.

We have also helped to create new surveys and use new collection methods to address customer and stakeholder needs. These include supplemental specialized surveys like those being tested in the Gulf of Mexico to better estimate red snapper total catch.

In addition, we have supported less visible but equally important initiatives to improve how we

calculate and share our estimates among states and regions, and with the public at large.

Complete details of all the studies and projects that MRIP has launched and continues to support are available at the MRIP website, countmyfish.noaa.gov.

Applying the Approach Across the Entire Program

This strategic approach has worked well at the survey level as a way of bringing together a broad and diverse array of partners and stakeholders – along with their collective intellectual capital – to improve recreational fishing surveys.

As we enter a new phase in MRIP, one characterized by a sharper focus on regional implementation of those surveys, the team is now taking the opportunity to apply our strategic approach to the program as a whole.

Moving forward, job one, of course, is to continue our ongoing work of improving our surveys and systems. This includes regional initiatives such as the continued implementation of the Fishing Effort Survey Transition Plan. It also includes national efforts, like the new policy directive on electronic reporting programs and the related For Hire Road Map, which outlines the process of moving to electronic logbooks in the for-hire fishery.

This Implementation Plan outlines the ongoing survey improvements, as well as our expanding strategic approach. It also includes milestones and priorities for each of the MRIP teams.

Partnerships to Address Recreational Data Priorities

Since 2008, MRIP has provided approximately \$15.6 million in funding through FY16 to state agencies, regional partners, independent researchers, and others to develop and test 111 regionally based pilot studies. For complete details of these and other projects, visit countmyfish.noaa.gov.

2016 Funded Projects

Atlantic/Gulf of Mexico

Exploring Differences Between Mail and Telephone Survey Estimates of Fishing Effort is exploring a type of measurement error in the Coastal Household Telephone Survey and contributing to the development of a calibration model to revise historical MRIP effort and catch estimates.

Caribbean/Gulf of Mexico/South Atlantic

Integrating Recreational Datasets on SEFSC Oracle Server is providing more timely availability of data for management and assessments by taking processes used by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to produce a region-specific recreational catch file and move them to an automated process on an Oracle database server.

Pacific

Assessing Alternative Estimation Methodologies and Potential Bias is evaluating an alternative survey design for monitoring fisheries in Puget Sound, Washington, to improve the accuracy and precision of future estimates.

California Recreational Fisheries Survey Infrastructure for Analysis and Reporting Tools is creating the infrastructure required to integrate California Recreational Fisheries Survey (CRFS) data into analysis and reporting tools, as well as a standardized exchange format for transmission to the Pacific RecFIN and other agencies.

Evaluating Phone and Mail Survey Methods for Estimating Effort is comparing marine recreational fishing effort estimates created with phone and mail surveys in Oregon. These effort estimates will be applied to catch-per-angler data to estimate total catch for a Shore and Estuary Boat Survey (SEBS) pilot project.

Western Pacific

Improving Catch Statistics through Census-Based and Club-Based Logbooks is testing the efficacy of multiple data collection methods to capture spear fishing activity in the Marianas and establish a spear fisher registry.

Ongoing Data Improvement Projects

Electronic Reporting

NOAA Fisheries Procedural Directive

In recognition of growing stakeholder expectations and the potential significant benefits of expanded electronic reporting (ER), NOAA Fisheries recently issued a new procedural directive that explicitly “affirms MRIP’s commitment to develop and expand use of ER technologies that produce sound data in an efficient manner.”

The directive also specifies the type of ER projects MRIP will support. In priority order, these are:

- Support the work needed to develop and implement ER technologies for logbook reporting in the for-hire industry (or other census-based approaches), including the development of new reporting technologies and methods to validate reported information.
- Explore ER technologies that can be used by fisheries samplers in the field.
- Collaborate with partners to examine the utility of supplemental angler reporting applications. This includes working with partners to develop and set standards for third parties to use in development of their own applications.

For-Hire Electronic Logbook Census

MRIP is currently working to provide opportunities for regional partners to derive for-hire fishing estimates by replacing random sampling of charter vessels with a complete census of all for-hire trips, with supporting validation sampling.

Creating effective electronic reporting systems replace paper logbooks is a key element of this transition.

Working together with for-hire operators, state partners, fisheries managers, independent statisti-

cians, and others, MRIP has published a detailed Road Map for moving to census-based for-hire electronic reporting programs, along with a list of ongoing studies and their timelines for completion. One critical outcome of the extensive collaborative process of research, literature reviews, pilot studies, and analysis leading to the development of this Road Map has been a consensus among managers, scientists, and operators on a core set of requirements that must be met for any census-based electronic logbook program to be successful. These are:

- Work toward achieving the goal of developing a complete census of all participants in the fishery;
- Include procedures for expanding estimates to account for any mis-reporting or non-reporting;
- Maintain a complete registry of all for-hire vessels and operators;
- Require mandatory weekly trip-level electronic reporting; build in flexibility to require more frequent reporting when necessary and for operators to declare periods of inactivity in advance;
- Allow the use of multiple authorized applica-

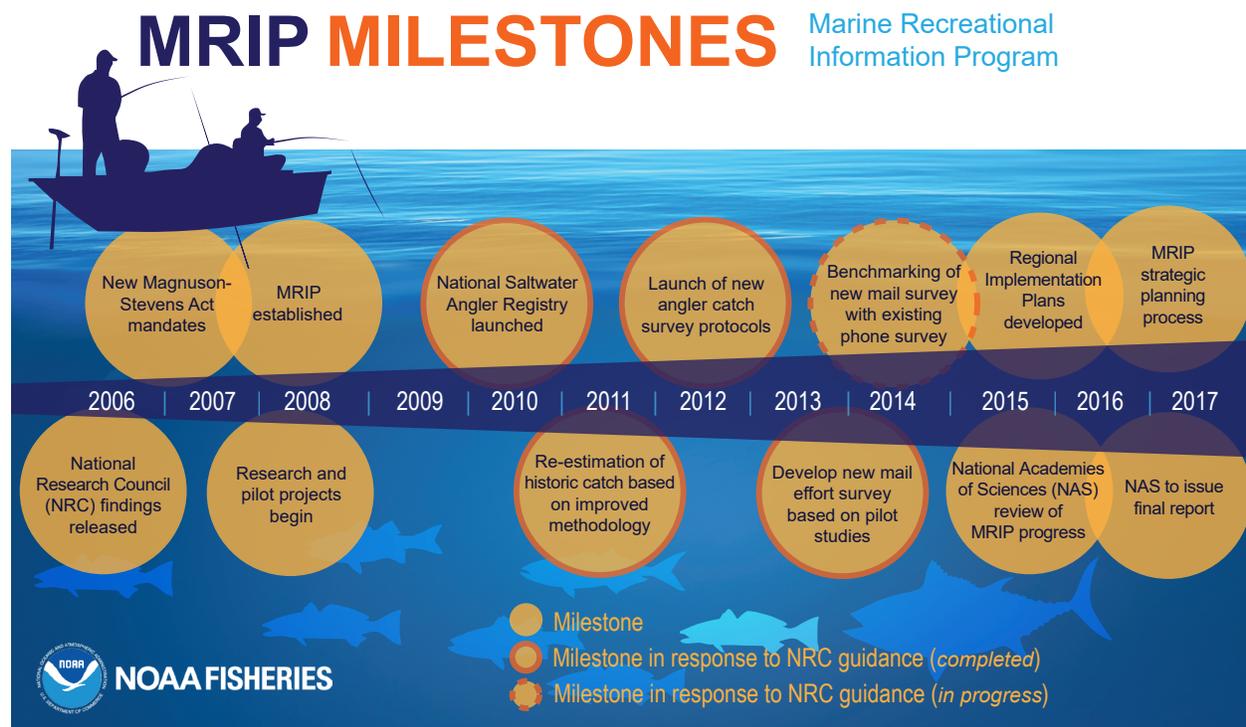
tions or devices for reporting, as long as they meet data quality standards;

- Implement accountability measures to ensure compliance, and develop compliance tracking procedures that balance timeliness with available staff and funding resources;
- Use standardized procedures to validate electronic logbook data;
- Reduce (or preferably eliminate) paper reporting and eliminate duplication to ease operator reporting burdens;
- Maintain paper-based reporting options for catastrophic conditions; and
- Closely coordinate design and implementation with states, Regional Offices, Science Centers, and Fisheries Information Networks.

Supplemental Specialized Surveys

Most saltwater recreational fishing surveys are designed to measure fishing activity over relatively broad geographic areas and time periods.

However, when a large amount of fishing takes place over a short amount of time and in a limited area – like red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico and



snowy grouper in the South Atlantic – managers and scientists are faced with a special challenge. In the first place, it's difficult to sample enough anglers during these brief seasons to produce precise estimates of catch. Additionally, under current methods, estimates cannot generally be produced until after the season is finished.

Building off our recent red snapper work with the states of Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, and Texas, MRIP is teaming up with the regional Fisheries Information Networks, Councils and Commissions, state agencies, and other partners to meet these types of challenges. Solutions may range from conducting a census in very small fisheries, to implementing specialized permitting and reporting requirements, to using new statistical models to identify and sample anglers with the specialized fishing permits.

Improved Estimates of Released Fish

Currently, information on recreational fishing releases is collected through the same dockside surveys used to measure catch per trip. Measuring catch – fish that anglers have landed and kept – can be accomplished through direct observation. Samplers can also measure, weigh, and make a definitive species identification of each fish.

By contrast, accurately measuring released fish requires anglers to report from memory the size and species of each fish they caught and returned to the water. In addition, anglers are asked the condition of the fish they released. Relying on memory causes many people to speculate that self-reported data on released catch is likely to be highly inaccurate. To test this speculation, MRIP will develop, test, and compare alternative methods for estimating released catch with our current methods to see if there are significant differences in the results. If alternative methods yield consistently different results, we will work with our partners, stakeholders, and data customers to weigh the potential advantages and disadvantages of each approach,

then choose the methods that will provide the best results.

In 2017, MRIP is launching a series of steps to start this process. These will begin with a workshop in collaboration with Gulf FIN and other partners to assess methods for improving estimates of released fish and identify specific potential new approaches we could test.

Ongoing APAIS Improvements

On the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, angler catch per trip is measured using the Access Point Angler In-



tercept Survey (APAIS). In 2013, APAIS was overhauled to remove biases identified in its design. Since then, we've made ongoing adjustments to enhance the survey. Most recently, beginning in 2016, management of the onsite surveys shifted from federal contractors to the marine fisheries management agency of each state. This will help build stronger relation-

ships with anglers through closer interaction with their state agency, and to improve collaboration and information-sharing among NOAA, the states, and recreational fishermen.

Over the next year, we will focus on working with our partners to increase the number of angler intercepts in states and fishing modes where low numbers have impacted the precision of our estimates. We are also continuing our work to improve our estimates for rare event species. These present a challenge because the inherently small number of sample sizes make it difficult to produce precise estimates.

Continued FES Transition Plan Implementation

In 2015, we created a three-year process to transition our surveys of fishing effort on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts from the Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) to the new mail-based Fishing Effort Survey (FES), which uses saltwater fishing license and registration information as one source of contact information.

To ensure a smooth transition from the CHTS to the FES, MRIP developed a Transition Team made up of NOAA, regional, and state representatives to lead a three-year transition process. In 2016, the team completed a series of studies and benchmarking activities confirming that there are no potential technical issues that would delay the timeline established in the Transition Plan. Key priorities for 2017 include:

- Continue the side-by-side benchmarking of the CHTS and FES surveys.
- Develop, test, peer review, and finalize a calibra-

tion model to ensure an appropriate conversion of historical CHTS estimates into estimates more comparable to the new FES estimates;

- Apply the calibration model to re-estimate historical fishing effort and catch for private boat and shore fishing; and
- Incorporate the new estimates into stock assessment updates for key species, as measured by factors such as proportion of the catch that comes from the recreational sector, and the importance of the species to regional recreational fishing activity.

2016-17 Strategic Priorities

As we enter a new phase in MRIP, one characterized by a sharper focus on regional implementation of our surveys, the team is now taking the opportunity to apply our strategic approach of evaluation-innovation-implementation to the program as a whole.

Evaluation

Government Accountability Office Review

In 2015, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducted a review of MRIP at the request of the Senate Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard.

The GAO commended NOAA Fisheries for taking important steps to strengthen its data collection efforts, which included developing MRIP and improving collaboration with stakeholders and partners.

This review also provided concepts to incorporate and challenges to consider as MRIP continues to build trust among key stakeholders, develop relationships, and clearly articulate goals to improve recreational fisheries data collection.

Specifically, the GAO recommended the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for MRIP, as well as a robust communication and education plan. Our approach to developing and implementing the strategic plan is outlined in the Innovation section that follows. Details of the revised communication and education plan are detailed in the Implementation section.

National Academies of Science Review

A key factor driving the initial development of MRIP was a 2006 review of our recreational fishing survey methods by the National Research Council (NRC), now known as the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (NAS).

By 2015, we had substantially addressed the recommendations included in the 2006 review. To objectively assess our progress and to define any further improvements needed in our surveys or communications with stakeholders, NOAA commissioned the NAS to conduct a second review of MRIP in 2016.

The review – which included a series of public listening sessions – sought to identify potential areas for survey improvements or programmatic changes that could further increase the quality of our data and the effectiveness of our outreach.

Initial findings from the NAS report will be shared with NOAA in December of 2016, and will serve as an important element in our strategic planning process. The final report is expected by April 2017.

Communications Needs Assessment

As part of our expanded communications and

outreach efforts, the MRIP Communications and Education Team has contracted with the an outside consultant to conduct a communications needs assessment among our partners and stakeholders. This assessment will help determine the value and utility of the communications products we have produced in the past, identify successes and gaps, and provide specific recommendations for future activities.

Innovation

Strategic Planning

A major 2016 programwide activity will be the strategic planning process recommended by the GAO to expand upon the current MRIP implementation planning efforts. The process will incorporate feedback from our partners and stakeholders, as well as from the NAS review. The final plan will:

- Establish overall program goals and strategies, including enhanced communication and outreach efforts;
- Identify resource requirements and timelines for achieving objectives; and
- Establish program performance measures.

The final plan is scheduled to be completed by March 31, 2017.

Process Improvements

MRIP is exploring opportunities to improvements the internal processes and systems used to manage our various surveys and produce estimates from those surveys. The process will consist of two parts: the documentation of all the methods currently in place, followed by a technical workshop led by expert external consultants.

The effort will streamline processes, increase efficiencies, and reduce redundancies throughout our operations.

Implementation

Communications Plan

In 2016, MRIP implemented an updated strategic communications plan. As noted by the National Research Council in its initial review of NOAA Fisheries data collection, building understanding of and trust in our recreational fishing estimates is fundamental to the success of the program. The plan outlined a series of new strategies and tools aimed at achieving our core communications objectives:

- Engage partners and key stakeholders in all aspects of MRIP;
- Improve NOAA Fisheries' understanding of stakeholder's perspectives on MRIP;



- Provide tools and resources that partners can use to communicate about MRIP to their audiences, members, and constituents;
- Build greater awareness and understanding of the interconnectedness among data collection, science, and management functions;
- Enhance internal, partner, and key stakeholder understanding of the MRIP process;
- Enhance communications with congressional members and staff; and
- Broaden angler and for-hire operator understanding of the critical importance of participating in recreational survey programs.

Regional Implementation Plans

As MRIP priorities increasingly focus on certifying our improved methods for implementation in the field, each region is preparing its own unique implementation strategy.

These plans represent a significant evolution in the course of MRIP, clearly establishing that each region will take the lead role in determining which survey methods are most suitable for their science and management needs.

The regional implementation plans set the data collection standards for each region; identify appropriate methods for regional surveys from among MRIP-certified designs; set regional priorities for improved timeliness, precision, and coverage; identify any special regional needs; identify expected resource needs, and outline implementation costs and timelines.

Councils and states have been involved through their membership on the FINs, i.e. Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP – Atlantic), Gulf FIN (Gulf of Mexico), and Pacific RecFIN (West Coast). With assistance from the Caribbean and Western Pacific Councils, and the state territorial agencies, we are also developing plans for those regions as well. Similarly, an ad hoc group has been established to set priorities for the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species fishery.

The processes and priorities established in each regional plan follow:

Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program

- Improve Percent Standard Error (PSE) in estimates through optimized sampling and state-based management of data collection.
- Establish monthly reporting and estimation as opposed to two-month waves.
- Integrate for-hire reporting methods, specifically:
 - Secure MRIP certification of eTRIPS/Mobile for use in for-hire reporting.
 - Finalize validation methodology for electronic logbooks, possibly including ongoing pre-validations and APAIS intercepts.
 - Determine a calibration methodology for transitioning to new methods.
 - Develop a comprehensive electronic for-hire logbook data collection program (encompassing federal and state, headboat and charter boat) while reducing duplicate reporting.
 - Incorporate use of electronic logbooks into the For Hire Survey framework.
 - Ultimately, transition to electronic logbooks for primary data collection.

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species

- Completion of LPS re-estimation for Maine through Virginia to identify any errors in estimation that will need to be corrected in the LPS redesign.
- LPS re-design that incorporates non-response weights, improves data collection on trips originating from private access sites, corrects for tournament vs. non-tournament biases, and optimizes sample sizes to improve PSE's on rare event species
- Establish a baseline assessment of current data collection programs, and identify data collection gaps.
- Develop a prioritized approach for implementing improved methods that address national and regional needs.
- Create a process for combining statistics derived from multiple sources.

- Identify costs and secure resources.

Caribbean

- Fully describe regional needs for recreational fishing data and statistics, including needs for coverage, resolution, precision, and timeliness of survey estimates.
- Establish a baseline assessment of current data collection programs, and identify data collection gaps.
- Develop a prioritized approach for implementing improved methods that address national and regional needs.
- Create a process for combining statistics derived from multiple sources.
- Identify costs and secure resources.
- Transfer administration of MRIP, including the hiring of samplers, to the regional level.

Gulf FIN

- Ensure full funding for MRIP general surveys at base sampling levels.
- Develop MRIP-certified specialized landings surveys.
- For-hire electronic logbook implementation and validation.
- Improve accuracy and timeliness of the saltwater fishing license frame.
- Improve precision of landings estimates by increasing dockside sampling levels.
- Improve recreational discard/release data.
- Transition from two-month waves to monthly



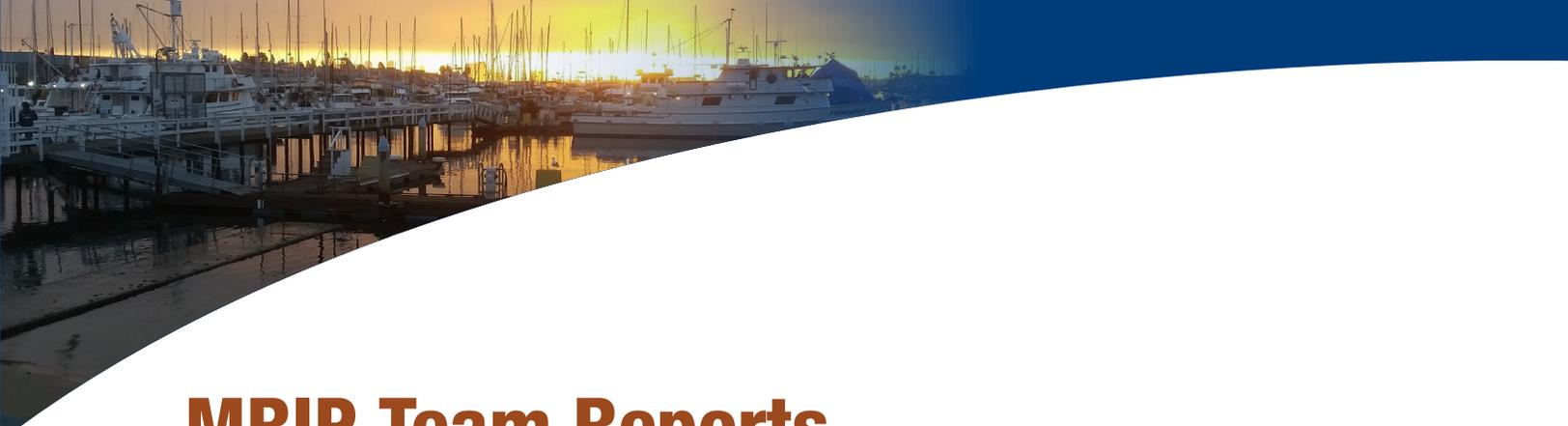
reporting of recreational estimates.

Pacific RecFIN

- Funding for implementation of winter “shoulder month” recreational fishery sampling in Oregon and Washington.
- Funding to re-initiate Oregon’s Shore and Estuary Boat sampling programs.
- Additional funding to support age data collection in California.
- Provide more resources to support the base fishery sampling programs in each state.

Western Pacific

- The data collection partners for the Pacific Islands (PIRO, PIFSC, Western Pacific Fisheries Management Council; Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources; WPacFIN, and the territorial governments) are working with MRIP to organize a Regional Implementation Team in the first quarter of FY17.
- The team will develop an MRIP Regional Implementation Plan for Hawaii and the Western Pacific territories in 2017. The Plan will initially focus on decisions for preferred survey designs, drawing on the results of MRIP pilot projects that have been conducted to develop and test survey designs best suited to the islands’ fisheries. It will also address:
 - Descriptions of regional needs for recreational fishing statistics, including needs for coverage, resolution, precision, and timeliness of survey estimates;
 - A baseline assessment of current data collection programs, including the extent to which current programs satisfy needs and identification of data collection gaps;
 - Recommendations and justification for a sequential, prioritized approach for implementing improved methods that address national and regional needs that are currently unmet;
 - A proposed process for combining statistics derived from multiple sources; and
 - Estimated costs, both overall and for individual survey components



MRIP Team Reports

Executive Steering Committee

The **Executive Steering Committee** (ESC) guides MRIP's priority-setting and decision-making processes. Representing state, federal, and public interests, the role of the ESC is to provide:

- A connection between MRIP and the federal and state marine fisheries agencies, interstate marine fisheries commissions, and regional fishery management councils to ensure that user needs are being met;
- A means of accountability for the senior leadership of MRIP;
- Assistance in strategic decisions for MRIP; and
- Representation for MRIP in meetings of agencies and organizations outside of NOAA.

The ESC also reviews the workplans of each MRIP project team.

Key 2016 Milestones

- **Initiated a review of MRIP by the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (NAS).** The ESC led the effort to develop terms of reference and a contract for this review of MRIP by NAS (formerly the National Research Council). The purpose of the review – which included a series of public listening sessions – is to identify potential areas for survey improvements or programmatic changes that could further increase the quality of our data and the effectiveness of our outreach. Findings from the review will be made public in April 2017.
- **Initiated a strategic planning process for MRIP.** Based on a recommendation from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the ESC began a formal strategic planning process to supplement MRIP's annual implementation planning. The ESC approved the strategic planning development process the schedule for completion. The new strategic plan is expected to be finalized by March 31, 2017.

2017 Activities and Resources

In addition to oversight of the rollout of the NAS findings and the strategic planning process, in 2017 the ESC will be working with each of the regional Fisheries Information Networks and their equivalents to review and support their inaugural Regional Implementation Plans.

ESC Members

Ned Cyr, NOAA Fisheries, Office of Science & Technology (chair)
Gordon Colvin, NOAA Fisheries, Office of Science & Technology (executive secretary)
Robert Beal, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
Dave Donaldson, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
Randy Fisher, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission
Doug Mecum, NOAA Fisheries, Alaska Regional Office
Emily Menashes, NOAA Fisheries, Office of Sustainable Fisheries
Bonnie Ponwith, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Fisheries Science Center
Russ Dunn, NOAA Fisheries, Office of Assistant Administrator

ESC Participants

Dick Brame, Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee and Coastal Conservation Association
Miguel Rolon, Caribbean Fishery Management Council
Kitty Simonds, Western Pacific Fishery Management Council

Operations Team

Key 2016 Milestones

Fishing Effort Survey (FES). MRIP continued to evaluate biases in the FES design. In early 2016, we completed a pilot study to compare the existing two-month wave to a shorter one-month reference period. In addition to examining recall error, this study assessed the feasibility of estimating fishing effort for one-month intervals. We anticipate that results from this pilot study will be available in early 2017. We also initiated a pilot study in the summer of 2016 that will attempt to re-contact FES respondents to collect more detailed fishing trip information, as well as validate information reported in the FES mail survey. The study, which collects information through internet and mail questionnaires, will be completed at the end of 2016. Finally, we implemented a study to test for under-reporting of fishing activity in the Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS). We anticipate that this study, which will also be completed at the end of 2016, will help explain difference between FES and CHTS effort estimates.

About the Operations Team

The Operations Team designs, tests, and recommends improvements to NOAA Fisheries' recreational fishing data collection programs. Each year, the team collaborates on research projects with experts in survey design and management, natural resource management, and stock assessment science, and individuals representing the recreational saltwater fishing community. Since 2008, the Operations Team has funded 111 projects to develop improved survey designs that increase the accuracy of recreational fishing catch, effort, and participation estimates. Team members and participants include representatives from NOAA Fisheries, Regional Offices and Science Centers, regional Fishery Management Councils, Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions, state agencies, and external stakeholder groups. More details about the team and its current membership are available on the MRIP website.

Alaska Fishing Guide Electronic Logbooks. The Team supported the development of internet applications and associated systems for angler trip data entry, trip review and editing, and fishing guide business configuration for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Sport Fish's for-hire sport fishing electronic logbook program. A number of business rules and design features were then incorporated into mobile device applications that can also operate off-line. The angler trip data entry application allows entering basic for-hire angler trip data (e.g., date, business name, guide name, and vessel) and specific data about the trip (e.g., the hour the trip ended; the statistical area where fishing occurred; and the residency, fishing license number, and catch and harvest by fish species for each angler). The application also allows cloning trips for ease in data entry when the guide, vessel, location fished and/or angler are the same during multiple trips. Outreach to the guided saltwater sport fishing industry was initiated, with testing of the applications and systems slated for fall 2016 and a pilot project planned for summer 2017.

South Carolina Charter Boat Electronic Logbook Validation. ACCSP and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, working with outside consultants, have developed a method to match logbook data with dockside intercepts. The electronic charter boat trip reports platform became available in January 2016 for charter boat license holders and additional dockside data collection will be completed this October for validation. The analysis of the data will be completed by the spring of 2017.

2017 Activities and Resources

- **Continued development and evaluation of specialized surveys to monitor red snapper landings.** Oversee completion and conduct subsequent Operations Team review of the Texas iSnapper project, and oversee consultant review of the Alabama and Mississippi data collection programs.
- **Design, testing, and evaluation of electronic logbooks for the for-hire sector.** Implementation of the South Carolina electronic logbook project; design and testing of electronic logbooks to monitor for-hire effort, catch, and harvest in Alaska.
- **Testing for bias in the FES.** Completion of testing of one-month waves to evaluate recall error, imple-

mentation of a “gatekeeper” experiment to test for measurement and screening errors, and implementation of a follow-up study to validate FES data.

- **Continued design and evaluation of survey methods in the Western Pacific region.** Working with the Hawaii Marine Recreational Fishing Survey and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to improve estimates of recreational spear fishing.
- **Continued efforts to enhance West Coast data collection programs:**
 - Evaluating phone and mail survey methods for estimating effort in the Oregon Shore and Estuary Boat (SEB) Fishery.
 - Intensive monitoring of the recreational halibut and marine fish fisheries using an aerial-access design.
 - Assessing alternate estimation methodologies and potential bias in recreational halibut and marine fish fisheries occurring in Washington’s Puget Sound.

Transition Team

Key 2016 Milestones

Ongoing Implementation of the FES Transition Plan.

Over the course of the past year, the Transition Team has issued three key reports outlined in the Transition Plan:

- **Initial Checkpoint Report.** The Transition Team and NOAA Fisheries reviewed preliminary side-by-side estimates of the CHTS and FES for January-August of 2015.
- **Full year of benchmarking Progress Report.** The Progress Report outlined the results from the first full year of a three-year side-by-side comparison between the FES and the CHTS. It also provided an update on the status of the transition.
- **Hypothetical stock assessment scenarios.** NOAA’s Northeast and Southeast Fisheries Science Centers tested the possible effects of hypothetical stock assessment scenario runs for several key stocks in those regions. This exercise sought to identify any technical complications that could possibly delay the transition to the FES.

About the Transition Team

The Transition Team manages the multifaceted process of transitioning to improved survey methods by working together with Councils, Interstate Commissions, and NOAA Fisheries Regions. The team is co-led by NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology and Office of Sustainable Fisheries. Team members and participants include representatives from NOAA Fisheries, Regional Offices and Science Centers, the regional Fishery Management Councils, the Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions, and several state agencies. More details about the team and its current membership are available on the MRIP website.

The primary outcome of these reports is that we have confirmed that the proposed timeline identified in our FES Transition Plan is feasible.

2017 Activities and Resources

Ongoing implementation of the FES Transition Plan:

- Continue the side-by-side benchmarking of the CHTS and FES surveys.
- Develop, test, peer review, and finalize a calibration model to ensure an appropriate conversion of historical CHTS estimates into estimates more comparable to the new FES estimates;
- Apply the calibration model to re-estimate historical fishing effort and catch for private boat and shore fishing; and

- Incorporate the new estimates into stock assessment updates for key species, as measured by factors such as proportion of the catch that comes from the recreational sector, and the importance of the species to regional recreational fishing activity.

National Saltwater Angler Registry Team

Key 2016 Milestones

- Completed the required biennial review of the registry fee, and raised fee to \$29. To keep the increase to this level we had to close the registry call center and are now issuing registrations via web only.
- Adopted a final Registry Memorandum of Understanding with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to maintain its status as an Exempted State. Previously, there had been an interim Memorandum of Understanding with Texas.

2017 Activities and Resources

To date, all coastal states and territories, except Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the U. S. Virgin Islands, are designated as Exempted States. The Exempted States have entered into formal agreements with NOAA Fisheries to provide lists of their licensed anglers and for-hire vessel operators (Atlantic and Gulf coast states) or catch and effort data via a regional data collection program (Pacific coast states and Island territories). Given that most data in the Registry is now delivered by states, in 2017, the Team will work with the MRIP Communications and Education Team to update the Registry website to clarify who is required to register as a means of reducing unnecessary inquiries and duplicate entries.

About the National Saltwater Angler Registry Team

The National Saltwater Angler Registry Team is responsible for the development and maintenance of the National Saltwater Angler Registry, a federal registry of recreational, saltwater anglers, and for-hire vessels. The Team is also responsible for the program that manages exemptions to the Registry for states that develop and share data from saltwater licensing or registration systems. Team members include representatives from NOAA Fisheries, the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fishery Management Councils, Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions, state agencies, and stakeholder organizations. More details about the Registry Team and state exemptions are available on the MRIP website.

Information Management Team

Key 2016 Milestones

For-Hire Vessel Directory. NOAA Fisheries, together with Atlantic and Gulf Coast partners, are working to develop a new online directory of for-hire vessels. Historically, regional partners have maintained separate lists of vessels, so the new online vessel directory will provide tools to reconcile field collected data with data available through the National Saltwater Angler Registry, as well as across states. The directory, which will be managed by NOAA Fisheries, will be used to develop and maintain sampling frames for surveys of the for-hire fisheries starting in 2017. This tool should support all three Information Management Team focus areas: data access, analytical tools, and data quality management. During the next phase of development for the vessel directory, NOAA Fisheries will incorporate additional information about the for-hire fleet, including regional permits.

About the Information Management Team

The Information Management Team supports the national-level processing and management of recreational saltwater fishing data by ensuring the comparability and compatibility of recreational fishing statistics among regional data collection programs. Team members include representatives from NOAA Fisheries, Regional Offices and Science Centers, Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions, Fisheries Information Networks, and state agencies. More details about the team and its current membership are available on the MRIP website.

New data structures and review tools. To increase the use and accessibility of our survey data, NOAA Fisheries has released additional data in easy-to-manipulate structures for public users.

Pacific Coast Database Migrations. In a coordinated effort, RecFIN, Oregon, Washington, and California are migrating to new databases. The overall goals of these projects are to simplify data access, enhance reporting, and improve consistency across the region. Individual projects are in varying stages of analysis, planning, and modeling. The Oregon Recreational Boat Survey completed the transition to SQL Server, providing improved stability, flexibility, and reporting capabilities.

Continued Release of Data Query Tool Features. To support a broadening estimate review team, new tools were developed to allow this team to quickly access our preliminary data and provide consistent tools for review. Data from the Large Pelagics Survey were made available on our download page.

2017 Activities and Resources

- **Enable more accessible data.** The team will include fully documented metadata (the contents and context of data) for all ongoing and legacy programs and make it available online to the public.
- **Improve regional databases.** The team will continue to modernize regional databases to improve access to data and processing efficiencies.
- **Provide data user education.** The team will develop tools to facilitate better communication of characteristics, processing, uses and limitations of the data.
- **Support for-hire vessel directory.** The team will continue to incorporate new sources of data into the for-hire vessel directory.

Communications and Education Team

Key 2016 Milestones

- Completed an improved, revised Strategic Communications Plan that adds operational details, including a timeline and a tactics section that builds out performance metrics, and adds emphasis on partners and partner roles.
- Completed an MRIP Communications Roles and Responsibilities statement that details the roles and responsibilities of the MRIP Communications and Education Team, the Team Chair, and the contractors supporting the program.
- Progress on **Short Term Tactical Approaches** in the Strategic Communications Plan include:
 - Completion of the red snapper timeline and outreach product developed jointly with Gulf FIN and supported by the states; worked closely with Gulf FIN and SERO on a Gulf red snapper web page, fact sheet, and Newscast highlighting several significant regional accomplishments that were only possible through strong partnerships and collaborative efforts; Gulf FIN is cross promoting these materials via the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and Gulf FIN digital and social channels.

About the Communications and Education Team

The Communications and Education Team (CET) carries out strategic communications to ensure partners and stakeholders are engaged in the survey redesign process and kept well-informed of MRIP's progress. The Team also works to build national and regional-level awareness and support for the Program and trust in the data. Team members include representatives from NOAA Fisheries, Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions, the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program, and Sea Grant. More details about the team and its current membership are available on the MRIP website.

- Execution of roll out communications in support of FES transition-related communications, the GAO final report on MRIP's recreational fisheries data collection efforts, and other initiatives.
- Developed an evolving media strategy to seize opportunities for raising positive awareness of program, including a Chief Science Officer interview for *USA Today* and media materials to support Atlantic partners in their transition to the management of APAIS.
- Progress on initial **Activation Tasks** in the Strategic Communications Plan include:
 - Expanded CET to include representatives from GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries, Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, and SERO.
 - Initiated work on an MRIP communications needs assessment, with stakeholder interviews to begin this fall.
 - Led an MRIP 101 webinar for the Atlantic Coast Fisheries Communications Group, whose members include public affairs staff for the Councils, NOAA colleagues, and media representatives for coastal state resource agencies.
 - Continued to create and provide fact sheets and other collateral materials for ACCSP state partners conducting APAIS.

2017 Activities and Resources

- Evaluating findings from the needs assessment and implementing recommendations into our Strategic Communications Plan.
- Continued expansion of the CET to include broader regional representation.
- Communications support for the activation of each Regional Implementation Plan.
- Support the Saltwater Angler Registry Team in updating its website to clarify who needs to register and who is exempt.
- Replication of our communications partnership efforts with ACCSP and the Atlantic Coast Fisheries Communications Group to other Fisheries Information Networks and regional working groups.

